ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

Published under the auspices of the: World Council of Churches · International Missionary Council
World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations · World Young Women's Christian Association
World's Student Christian Federation · World Council of Christian Education · United Bible Societies

EDITOR: JOHN GARRETT · 17 ROUTE DE MALAGNOU · GENEVA · SWITZERLAND
TEL. 36 71 30 · CABLES OIKOUMENE U.S. ENQUIRIES: WCC, 156 FIFTH AVE. NEW YORK 10: TEL. WATKINS 4-8551

No. 47/26th Year 4th December, 1959.

On Other Pages

Roman Catholic Council Asked to Speak on Religious Liberty . . . . Page 2
Presbyterians in US Seek Korean Reconciliation . . . . . Page 3
Italian Protestants Seek Equality under Penal Code . . . . . Page 3
Progress Reported on US Faith and Order Commission . . . . . Page 4
Late Abbé Couturier's Prayer Week Spreads . . . . . Page 5
Orthodox Leader Urges Bi-lateral Unity Talks . . . . . Page 6
Italian Protestants Dislike Eisenhower's Vatican Visit . . . . . Page 6
Colombia Asks Report on Protestant Charges . . . . . Page 7
In Brief . . . . . Page 7

US Catholic Bishops Attack "Family Planning" Advocates

(Washington) - The Roman Catholic hierarchy of North America has come out strongly against proposals for using contraception to curb the "population explosion" in underdeveloped areas.

In a statement called "Explosion or Backfire", issued at the close of their annual meeting, the 200 bishops declared that "population explosion" was a terror technique phrase and singled out for denunciation the "attempts of some representatives of Christian bodies who endeavour to elaborate the plan into a theological doctrine which envisages artificial birth prevention within the married state as the 'will of God'".

(The report of a study group on the population problem held at Oxford, England, last April, supported family planning and said there was no moral objection in principle to use of artificial methods of birth control. The report, requested by the officers of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches, has been given world-wide publicity.)

Objections listed by the American bishops are that artificial birth control is contrary to "natural law", and would hinder self-control in under-developed lands.

The aim of the Ecumenical Press Service is to keep its readers informed of trends of thought and opinion in and about the Churches and Christian Movements. It is therefore not to be held responsible for opinions expressed in its news items. EPS may be freely reproduced in any form with acknowledgment.

They say that migration offers a solution to the great growth of world population if linked with an increase of acreage yield to offset food shortages.

In a section of their statement dealing with the "hysterical terrorism and bland misrepresentation of data" in their opponents' views, the hierarchy's members say: "It never seems to dawn on them that in a chronic condition where we have more people than food, the logical answer would be not to decrease the number of people but to increase the food supply, which is almost unlimited in potential".

Reaffirming the Roman Catholic stand that birth control by use of the "safe period" is permissible, the bishops say they do not wish to "discourage demographers, economists, agricultural experts and political scientists in their efforts to solve the problem", but that they are against "the unilateral 'guesstimates' of special pleaders" that might "stampede or terrorize the United States into a national or international policy inimical to human dignity".

Another point made by the bishops is that international Communism is not advocating cutting down natural population growth. They assert that peoples aspiring to economic development and political status might be induced to accept other specious Communist approaches because Communism does not insist that "reducing fertility is essential to the achievement of such goals". EPS, Geneva

Roman Catholic Council Asked to Speak on Religious Liberty

(Geneva) - Hope that the coming Vatican-convened Ecumenical Council will "speak clearly on the question of religious liberty" was voiced here by officials of world confessional bodies representing some 250 million Christians.

Such a pronouncement is "highly important for the sake of improving inter-church relations", said the international spokesmen for ten church groups ranging from Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox to Pentecostals and Friends (Quakers).

At a two-day meeting of world confessional groups, November 24 - 25, the common view was expressed that "all who have occasion to express the opinions of the non-Roman churches on the subject of the next Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church should underline that it is highly important, for the sake of improving inter-church relations, that this council should speak clearly on the question of religious liberty".

Other Protestant world bodies represented at the gathering were those of the Lutherans, Presbyterian-Reformed, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and Churches of Christ (Disciples).

The statement of consensus was drafted to summarize a discussion which took place after World Council of Churches staff members gave reports about the Vatican's indicated plans respecting the Ecumenical Council.

In another statement of agreement, the participants in effect expressed confidence in the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs as the representative of most of their denominations in contact with the United Nations and other inter-governmental agencies, and hinted at the undesirability of separate approaches by the various ecclesiastical bodies. The CCIA is a joint agency of the WCC and the International Missionary Council.

The confessional representatives put on the record that "it was generally agreed among the participants... that the CCIA shall be considered as the main channel for voicing the convictions of the constituency of the churches participating in the WCC".

The confessional groups, they added, can participate in the CCIA's work "both by stimulating the growth of political understanding and Christian conviction about international issues in their churches, and by presenting and interpreting the concerns of the CCIA to their constituencies".

Meeting participants - who did not consider themselves empowered to pass resolutions at the sessions - approved this statement after hearing a report of the CCIA's activity from its director, Dr. O. Frederick Nolde of Philadelphia.

World confessional alliances represented were: the Lutheran World Federation, the Presbyterian World Alliance, the World Methodist Council, the Church of England Council of Inter-Church Relations, the Baptist World Alliance, the International Congregational Council, the World Convention of Churches of Christ, the Pentecostal World Conference, the Friends' World Committee for Consultation, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church. Also present was a WCC group headed by general secretary Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft. EPS, Geneva

Presbyterians in US Seek Korean Reconciliation

(New York) - The mission boards of the two largest Presbyterian churches in the US have made a joint appeal to Korean Presbyterians to settle their differences by reconciliation.

The approach was made by spokesmen for the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA and the Board of World Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the US following a split in the synod of the Korean church in October (see EPS No. 40).

A rift developed in the synod when a substantial minority group opposed continued membership in the World Council of Churches and attacked the use of the word "united" in the title of the Presbyterian Church USA. The USA (Northern) church, through its mission board, supports the Korean church's work.

The appeal of the US (Southern) missions board, which also has work in Korea, is a new attempt to settle differences amicably between the "ecumenical" and minority "anti-ecumenical" factions involved in the hot synod debate that led to October's rupture. EPS, Geneva

Italian Protestants Seek Equality under Penal Code

(Rome) - The Council of the Italian Federation of Protestant Churches has asked for the Italian Penal Code to give the same rights before the law to all religious beliefs.

The request came following announcement of draft changes in the code which would continue to inflict less severe sentences for "violation of the religious sentiment" of people belonging to non-Roman Catholic religious groups.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/eni-bulletin_1959-12-04_26_47

Drawing attention to the government's intention of revising the code to protect against interference with the free practice of religious faith, the Federation's Council asked the Italian government and parliament to bring changes into line with the Italian Constitution, which guarantees full religious liberty.

The Council's request has gone to the Italian Ministry of Justice.
EPS, Geneva

Australian Churches Aid "Soldiers' Children" in Japan

(Sydney) - The Australian Council for the World Council of Churches has launched an appeal for £50,000 to assist children of Australian servicemen in Japan.

The fund would provide financial assistance and education grants for an estimated 100 Japanese children fathered by Australians.

The Rev. Harvey Perkins, general secretary of the Australian Council, announced that the council had paid the legal costs, amounting to £500, for eight of the children to be adopted into American homes.

"We have done this reluctantly, and with shame", he said. "We regard it as conscience money, and the least that could be done, after three years of futile endeavour to break through the difficulties of bringing the children to Australia for adoption."

Mr. Perkins reported that the council was also planning to provide a social worker for three years to work among the children. EPS, Geneva

Protestants Develop Mass Media in Latin America

(Buck Hill Falls, Pa.) - The need for careful planning of Protestant broadcasting in Latin America has been stressed at the annual study conference of the National Council of Churches' (US) Committee on Cooperation in Latin America.

The Rev. Edwin M. Luidens, executive secretary of RAVEMCCO, the Radio, Visual Education and Mass Communications Committee of the NCC, said that the only hope of reaching the growing and predominantly youthful population of Latin America is through the mass media.

He pointed out that there are 2,000 Christian programmes broadcast each week, and that eleven major studios and nine radio stations are operated by 125 missionaries of US denominations. "Nowhere else in the world is there such a concentration of religious broadcasting", he said.

Mr. Luidens noted that a $250,000 Evangelical Audio Visual Centre, dedicated in 1958 at Campinas, Brazil, under the auspices of RAVEMCCO, is now 61 per cent self-supporting. EPS, Geneva

Progress Reported on US Faith and Order Commission

(New York) - Progress towards the creation of a permanent Faith and Order Commission in the United States has been reported in New York by the Commission's Advisory Committee.

The commission will parallel on a national scale the work of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission. It will be formed and supported by the National Council of Churches and the US Conference for the World Council.

The Rev. W.A. Norgren, a Protestant Episcopal clergyman who heads the NCC's Office of Faith and Order Studies, said that in connection with the Commission's establishment an analysis will be made of contributions to Faith and Order by youth, higher education and women's organizations. He said state and regional Faith and Order conferences are also planned.

In Geneva, Dr. Keith Bridston, executive secretary of the WCC's Department of Faith and Order, welcomed the announcement as "a mark of progress in ecumenical relations between the American churches". He said it is "an encouraging sign that the American churches have sufficient confidence in one another to face their basic differences frankly, openly and together, and an indication that the common faith in the essential oneness of the Church of Christ is now strong enough among them to expose these 'irreconcilables' of faith and order to ecumenical study and discussion".

The proposal to set up a national commission was made at the first North American Conference on Faith and Order at Oberlin, O., in 1957. The commission was authorized in 1958 by the NCC's General Board as "an on-going deliberative theological study in the area of order and organization" and as "an on-going study of the ecclesiological significance of local, state and national church councils". EPS, Geneva

Late Abbé Couturier's Prayer Week Spreads

(Lyon, France) - A record number of Roman Catholics will pray daily with other Christians during the Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 18 - 25, 1960, for "the unity Christ wills, at His appointed time and in His way".

Promotion of the week using this form of intercession is undertaken in Lyon by Father P. Michalon, a Sulpician priest, who since 1954 has been responsible for continuing the work begun by the late Abbé Paul Couturier, "apostle of Christian unity".

Forms of intercession for each day of the week, which runs concurrently with the official Roman Catholic Octave of Prayer for submission to the authority of the Holy See, are sent out to many countries in French and English versions. The "Lyon" form of intercession enables Roman Catholics and others to use the same prayers.

A "Christian Unity Association" has been formed in Lyon to extend Roman Catholic work for unity in the spirit of the Abbé Couturier and to cope with growing demands for literature each year during the week. Requests for the material have grown from 63,000 in 1953 to 700,000 in 1959. Translations were made last year in Danish, German, Arabic, Swedish, Dutch, and Spanish.

The intercessions were also used by Radio Monte Carlo and by stations in West Africa and Canada.

The Lyon Week of Prayer is held at the same time and in the same spirit as the parallel observance sponsored by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

Packets of material for use during the week are sent out by Father Michalon from the Séminaire Universitaire, place Abbé-Larue, Lyon 5e. EPS, Geneva

Orthodox Leader Urges Bi-lateral Unity Talks

(New York) - Archbishop Anthony Bashir of New York, Metropolitan of the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Church of North America, said here that any discussions on Christian unity "must be restricted to Orthodox Catholics and Roman Catholics".

To include Protestants in the discussions, he said, "could only result in chaos" because of the "enormous basic doctrinal divergences (of Protestants) from both Orthodox and Romans".

The Metropolitan made the comments in an official statement released in New York. He said the statement was issued to clarify his "basic convictions" concerning church unity and because the "most positive and encouraging responses" which he had made to Pope John XXIII's announcement of an Ecumenical Council "have been quoted and misquoted in the public and church press and elsewhere".

The Metropolitan praised the forthcoming Ecumenical Council, calling the suggestion a "tremendous achievement". He said he "fully " endorsed the suggestion, and the resistance or indifference of some Orthodox spokesmen, "the evident alarm of some Protestant ecumenists and the extreme caution of later comments from Rome," do not detract from the "value of this truly courageous act".

The Metropolitan added that of all the efforts towards Christian unity since World War I "the most encouraging event from the viewpoint of the Orthodox Church has been the suggestion by Pope John XXIII that serious consideration be given to Orthodox and Roman reunion".

The Metropolitan urged that Orthodox leaders give their utmost support to "the apparent intention of the Pope to pass beyond the traditional formalities and the empty euphonics of the past".

He suggested that the Pope, as Primate of the West, must begin by joining with Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Istanbul, as Primate of the East, in calling for a joint meeting of theologians and canonists from both churches. "The meeting which would follow", he observed, "although it might not arrive at immediate union, would provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to act, and might well lead to eventual unity." EPS, Geneva

Italian Protestants Dislike Eisenhower's Vatican Visit

(Rome) - The Federal Council of Protestant Churches in Italy has said Protestant circles in Italy and other countries feel embarrassed by President Eisenhower's scheduled call on Pope John XXIII.

President Eisenhower has requested a "private audience" with the Pope when he officially visits President Gronchi of Italy, December 4-6.

The Protestant council expresses concern because it says the visit might be interpreted as a personal act of homage to the Pope as a religious leader and be exploited for "propaganda purposes" in some Roman Catholic circles.

The Italian press has speculated about the meaning of the visit. "La Nazione", a Florence daily, says the interview "brings up the issue of arranging diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the USA".

The weekly "L'Espresso" has published a "note from Washington" stating that "on the occasion of his visit to Rome and Madrid, President Eisenhower intends to speak to John XXIII and General Franco about guaranteeing freedom of worship to Protestants and Jews". EPS, Geneva

Colombia Asks Report on Protestant Charges

(Bogata) - The House of Representatives of Colombia has requested three ministers of the presidential cabinet to appear before it to explain the treatment which Protestants have received in the country.

The action follows within a few weeks the presentation to the House of Representatives of a "memorial" signed by 14,000 Protestants and others alleging persecution of Protestants and calling upon the Colombian government to make effective the religious liberty guaranteed by the Constitution.

The memorial alleged that 116 Protestant Christians have been killed since 1948 because of their religious faith. During the same period, it said, 66 Protestant schools have been destroyed by fire or dynamite and over 200 Protestant schools closed.

It said further that children of Protestants have been discriminated against and persecuted in the nation's public schools and that many thousands of Protestants have had to abandon their farms and homes in order to escape persecution and death. (See EPS Nos. 8, 15, 16, 27, 40)

Before and since the memorial was presented there have been reports of a more liberal attitude by the government to Protestants.

This change was noted by the World Presbyterian Alliance at its meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in a letter to Dr. Alberto L. Camargo, the president of Colombia, in which it said it "has heard with deep satisfaction reports on the gradual re-establishment of liberty for the religious minorities of your country".

It added that "this satisfaction is all the greater because of the memory of the restrictions and the violence suffered by our Protestant brethren during the decade between 1948 and the re-establishment of democratic institutions" under Dr. Camargo's leadership.

Recently there has also been a report that Roman Catholic bishops have advised their faithful of La Plata to make restitution to Protestants in their town for damages incurred in a mob attack on an evangelical chapel.

A spokesman for the National Association of Evangelicals interpreted the act "as an indication of a more friendly attitude" towards Protestants.

EPS, Geneva

In Brief

A meeting of the Swedish Bishops' Conference scheduled for January is expected to discuss the desirability of ordaining women in the Lutheran State Church. Since the Swedish parliament passed legislation permitting the step no woman has applied; but the Swedish press says that Dr. Margit Sahlin, a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, intends to do so.

* *

Lutheran church circles in Sweden have strongly criticized the government's intention to introduce legislation abolishing the Church Assembly's right of veto over bills passed by the parliament and dealing with internal church affairs. Swedish church papers unanimously describe the proposal as a threat to the church's freedom to run its own affairs.

* *

An unofficial group of volunteers has formed an "Institute for Ecumenical Contacts" in Norway. The Rev. Dr. Peder Borgen is president. The group plans to give information on all aspects of the ecumenical movement and to improve Norwegian participation in ecumenical events abroad. Attempts will be made in the next two years to pave the way for more official contacts between the national Lutheran Church and other churches.

* *

The next World Institute on Christian Education will be held in or near Belfast, Ireland, in July, 1962, according to an announcement of the World Council of Christian Education's North American Community. The last Institute held at Kobe, Japan, August 1958, was attended by 200 Christian leaders from 60 countries. The WCCE is a federation of 59 cooperative Christian education groups, which continues the work of the World's Sunday School Association formed in 1907.

* *

Pope John XXIII is reported to be establishing in Rome an institute for the study of Protestantism to train Roman Catholic priests who will work in Protestant countries. Italian press agencies report that courses will last three years and be run for doctors of theology. The opening date of the school, which will be run by the Jesuit order, has not been announced.

* *

The Episcopal Church of Scotland (Anglican) has rejected an invitation from the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) to participate in next year's celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Reformation in Scotland. The primate of the church, the Bishop of Argyll and the Isles, said that his church's approach to the Reformation was so different that participation would have involved an unreality that would have been uncomfortable.

* *

A report of a Joint Commission on Church Union, set up by the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in Australia and submitted to the federal bodies of the three churches is being distributed outside Australia through the Lutterworth Press in London.

* *

The Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has confirmed the appointment of Archimandrite Emilian Timiadis as the Patriarchate's permanent representative at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Father Timiadis has been acting in the post since February 1959.

* *

The Evangelical Alliance in the United Kingdom, acting with the World Evangelical Fellowship, church leaders, and Bible and missionary societies, will again sponsor its annual Universal Week of Prayer, January 3-6, 1960. Observance of the Week throughout the world has been promoted internationally since 1846.

* *

Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist, executive secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, has been in hospital in Geneva suffering from high blood pressure. Dr. Lund-Quist, whose health has given concern this year, is convalescing in a local clinic and has been ordered complete rest until January 1.

* *

A three-volume Roman Catholic Bible printed in Yugoslavia and edited by the Catholic Bishop in Maribor is available in that country. It is reported, by Lutheran readers, to be "of high scientific and literary value", finely printed and translated into current Slovenian (see also EPS No. 44).

* *

Of 1,455 preaching posts in the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg, Germany, 293 are vacant. The 1,816 parishes of the church are partly in West Berlin and partly in the DDR. The lack of pastors in Berlin itself is not so great as in the rural districts. In East Berlin, 34 out of 184 posts are vacant; in West Berlin, 46 out of 332, and in the rural areas there are 213 vacancies out of 939 posts.

* *

Bishop Otto Dibelius has had two interviews with the acting Mayor of East Berlin. Church circles say the conversations are an attempt to clear up trouble caused by the bishop's leaflet on "Authority". (See also EPS No. 43)

* *

The November number of the Hungarian Communist monthly, "Tarsadelmi Szemle" has called for carrying "militant atheistic propaganda right into the family circle". The article says religion is still deeply rooted in the Hungarian people, even among party members, and calls on every Communist to begin with his own family, and give priority to the atheistic education of the children.

EPS, Geneva